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# Mlle. Cardonet's Melancholy Admirer

By PAUL GAULOT

Translated by William L. McPherson

WHEN M. Cardonet discovered that his fortune, thanks to war profits, had risen to more than five million francs, he sold his hosiery factory, bought a mansion in the Rue Murillo and dreamed of a brilliant social career for himself and his daughter.

Mlle. Cardonet's education had been somewhat neglected. He employed all sorts of teachers for her. Since he was weak in syntax and orthography he decided to take on a secretary. His choice fell on the son of a peasant in his native village—Justin Brillachon. The latter had won a public school scholarship and had then found a position in Paris as head tutor in a private school. M. Cardonet had thought of this young man both because of his educational qualifications and also because he was pleased to have it known back in the country that he required a secretary's services.

Justin Brillachon had gladly exchanged his modest tutorial functions for the better paid and more brilliant ones of secretary to a *nouveau riche*. To be well lodged and well-fed and to have practically nothing to do was the realization of all his dreams.

Mlle. Cardonet had graciously welcomed the young man, with whom she used to play when they were children, and he put himself out to do little services which she asked of him—advising her as to her social duties, telling her what books to read, etc.

Brillachon, who was without ambition and really thick-headed, seemed to have no desires beyond the material comforts which his new position secured him. What he enjoyed most was the table, always abundantly supplied. He ate and drank like a man who had a long score to settle. After meals he went into the library to take his ease. Sitting in the most com-

fortable chair, he smoked his pipe in a state of intense beatitude.

One day when Mlle. Cardonet came into the room, which was reeking with smoke, she could not help exclaiming:

"It smells like a smoking car! Phew!"

"I didn't know—I didn't know!" Justin stammered.

Then he began to excuse himself awkwardly by saying that tobacco smoke protected the books from microbes.

Hortense withdrew, saying:

"If that is so, Monsieur Justin, keep on smoking."

Some days later Mlle. Cardonet again entered the library and found neither the secretary nor the acrid odor of his pipe.

"Ah! Ah!" she said to herself. "This young man saw that I didn't like his tobacco and for my sake he is depriving himself of one of his greatest pleasures. Is he trying to do what he can to please me?"

Her curiosity was aroused on this point and she began to watch him. She saw most of him at meals. She noticed that he had begun to eat very sparingly. He scarcely touched the dishes which were passed him and often waved them aside with a huge sigh. He no longer emptied his wine glass, and when he drank it was either watered wine or clear water.

She carried her investigations further. She learned that he went out regularly twice a day and took lonely promenades in the Parc Monceau, walking very fast and with an absorbed and melancholy air.

There was but one cause for all these changed habits, she thought. And she was not long in finding the cause. The secretary was in love with her. Undoubtedly, he was trying to combat or to silence his passion, for he could not be under any illusions as to the chances which he had of marrying a girl worth millions. But would he persist in this heroic silence? If he should make a declaration there would be an unpleasant interview and then they would be obliged to send him away—

to turn him into the streets. She certainly had nothing with which to reproach herself—not the slightest shadow of coquetry. It was not her fault if she was captivating and won others' hearts without wishing to do so. But her own heart was full of pity and she wished to spare her poor admirer the shock of dismissal. So it was necessary to do something.

She was uncertain for a while what to do. Then she decided to lay the matter before her father.

"Ah, that's the way it is?" said M. Cardonet. "Well, I am going to let Justin know that he must give up this foolish hope. If he is obstinate I will discharge him."

That was not what she had in view.

"I believe it is better for you to pretend ignorance. I will speak to him myself and try to soften the blow by politely convincing him of his folly."

"As you wish. You are doubtless right," said M. Cardonet, who was not averse to being relieved of this duty.

Brillachon had gone out for one of his daily walks. She awaited his return and joined him in the library.

On opening the conversation she felt much more embarrassed than she had expected to be. She did not know how to attack the subject.

"You have just come back, Monsieur Justin?" she decided to say. "You have taken your usual turn? Do you enjoy walking?"

"Oh, no, mademoiselle, I walk for the sake of walking."

"Yes, I understand. You don't smoke any longer. You no longer make war on the library microbes."

"I didn't give it up voluntarily. I regret very much that I can't make war on them."

He sighed deeply.

"What is the matter with you, Monsieur Justin? You seem changed recently. I have noticed that you don't eat any longer—that you don't drink any longer—as you did when you first came."

"Yes, at first I acted without any regard

for the consequences. I never suspected when I accepted the advantageous position which M. Cardonet offered me, to what was going to be exposed. I ought to have had more self-control and to have resisted the seductions with which I have been surrounded."

"Evidently, Monsieur Justin, that would have been better. But I am glad to know that you have kept your head and realize the mistake which you might have made. Believe me when I say that I speak to you as a friend and that I sympathize with you in your sufferings, which will presently to an exercise of the will come to time."

"It will be harder and take longer than you think."

"I hope not. At your age the heart rights itself quickly."

"It is not my heart which is affected, mademoiselle."

"Ah!" she asked in astonishment, "what is affected?"

He put his hand on his breast and answered lugubriously.

"It is my stomach."

"Your stomach!" she cried. "What do you mean?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, it is my stomach. For some time I felt a weight there. My digestion was bad. I consulted a physician. He told me that I had gastritis. He put me on a strict diet. He forbade me to smoke. He ordered me to walk two hours every day."

Mlle. Cardonet had heard enough. She cut short the poor fellow's confidences. "Follow your instructions," she said. "I hope you will soon be cured."

Then she went to her father and with more or less embarrassment told him about the conversation she had just had.

"After all, it is better so," M. Cardonet concluded.

"Certainly," she replied, "and I am really pleased that this young man is not in love with me."

But her air of vexation contradicted her words. Her wounded vanity regretted having discovered only a case of gastritis where she had expected finding a great love on which to frown.

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